The Navy Values Community: Three Year Trends*

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Abstract

The Navy Core Values Survey (NCVS) was designed to assess knowledge of the Navy Core Values by members of the Navy community, and to measure attitudes and opinions related to those values. This paper reports on the results of the third administration of the NCVS, which was mailed out in November 1995. The sample of women and men (N = 3131) was drawn from ship and shore, across the spectra of paygrades and occupational fields. Data were analyzed using the SPSS-X statistical package. Based on the resulting response patterns, items are categorized into zones of strong consensus, substantial disagreement, and gray areas. In addition to results of the current survey, the paper highlights three-year trends in response patterns to NCVS items. The significance of the latest survey results and of the trends in response patterns is discussed relative to progress in building a coherent Navy values community. Conclusions are drawn, and suggestions are made for further research.

Through a long and careful process, the central values which should guide the conduct of the Navy and its people, both military and civilian, have been identified and articulated. These are the Navy Core Values: Honor, Commitment, and Courage.

The third annual NCV survey was mailed in November 1995 to a sample of 7,500 Navy women and men, at sea and ashore, and across the spectra of paygrades and occupational fields (excluding personnel with less than six months of service). Returned surveys were scanned into a database and the data analyzed using the SPSS-X statistical package. Surveys returned by the cutoff date (30 April 1996) totaled 3,158, with an additional 321 being returned as undeliverable, for an effective response rate of 46.3 percent. A total of 3,131 surveys were included in the analyses.

Highlights

Based on response patterns, survey questions (two concerning knowledge, 60 on attitudes/opinions) were separated into three categories: (a) Strong Consensus; (b) Substantial Disagreement; and (c) Gray Areas. Representative survey items for each category are shown below.

Strong Consensus. Response patterns to items in this category attest to a congruence among Navy women and men between their personal values and the Navy Core Values. In this area of 70 percent or greater agreement, the Navy can find the nucleus of a strong values community. Many of the three-year trends for survey questions in this category are positive, and this could be expected, given the onset of NCV training, wherein the Core Values are taught and discussed and considered in light of their personal relevance.

Question 61 was meant to measure how well the three NCV were known by the Navy community. In the 1995 survey, 87.3 percent of respondents correctly identified the three values: Honor, Commitment, and Courage. This item moved up from the Gray Areas in 1994.
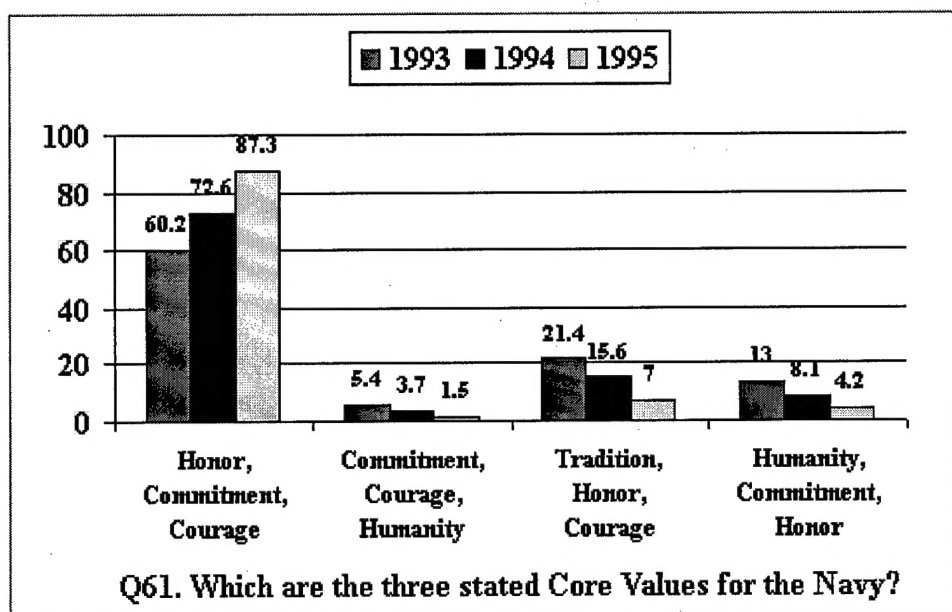
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* The opinions expressed are the author's, and do not necessarily reflect official Department of the Navy policy.

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1993   ■ 1994   □ 1995

Q61. Which are the three stated Core Values for the Navy?

Figure 1. Three-year response patterns for Question 61.

Figure 2 shows the responses to Questions 1, 2, 24, and 26. In Question 1, respondents feel that the NCV are applicable to everyday life (86.4% agreement, 4.7% disagreement, 8.0% undecided). For Question 2, which stated that it is easy to live by the Core Values, there was 82.1 percent agreement; 7.3 percent disagreed and 17.9 percent remained undecided. An overwhelming 97.8 percent agreed that responsibility is a key quality of an effective Navy man or woman, whether civilian or military (Question 24); less than one percent (0.5%) disagreed, and 1.6 percent were undecided. A much lower percentage (77.6%) feel they can make honest recommendations to their supervisor (Question 26); 12.8 percent said they could not, and 9.6 percent were uncertain.

Substantial Disagreement. This category includes survey questions having a response pattern with less than 50 percent agreement (or disagreement on a reverse-coded question). Such patterns can be seen as indicative of polarization within the Navy, caused by relatively low agreement with the Navy Core Values, or, more often, of low opinions about the manifestation of the NCV in daily work activities. The percentage of undecided responses is generally much higher.

Figure 3 shows responses to Questions 9, 11, 13, and 14. Question 9 was reverse coded, and in 1995, 46.9 percent disagreed that whether you were held accountable depends on your paygrade, or who you work for. However, 41.6 percent agreed with that statement, and another 11.6 percent were undecided. Responses to Question 11 show 46.8 percent agreeing that loyalty to the Navy is more important than loyalty to peers, subordinates, and supervisors. Thirty percent (30.0%) disagreed, however, and a large percentage (23.2%) remained undecided on this issue. That one of the best characteristics of the Navy is concern for people (Question 13) was agreed with by 43.7 percent of the 1995 sample, but another 39.0 percent disagreed, with 17.4 percent uncertain. Question 14 (reverse coded), shows an almost even split between agree (36.6%) and disagree (38.9%) to the statement, "The problem is that if I report someone for wrongdoing, the Navy may not back me up." Almost a fourth of the sample were undecided (24.5%).
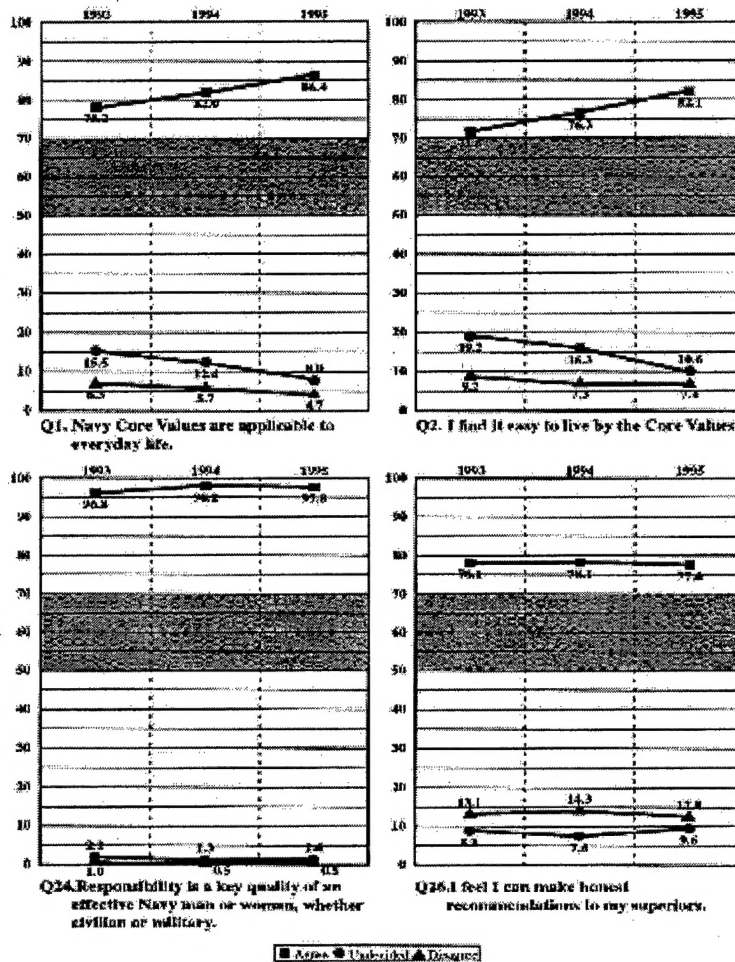
Strong Consensus

Q1. Navy Core Values are applicable to everyday life.

Q2. I find it easy to live by the Core Values.

Q24. Responsibility is a key quality of an effective Navy man or woman, whether civilian or military.

Q26. I feel I can make honest recommendations to my superiors.

■ Agree ● Undecided ▲ Disagree

Figure 2. Three-Year Response Patterns for Questions 1, 2, 24, and 26.

Substantial Disagreement

Q9. (Reverse Coded) Whether or not you are held accountable depends on your paygrade, or who you work for.

Q11. Loyalty to the Navy is ultimately more important than loyalty to my peers, subordinates and supervisors.

Q13. One of the best characteristics of the Navy is concern for people.

Q14. (Reverse Coded) The problem is that if I report someone for wrongdoing, the Navy may not back me up.

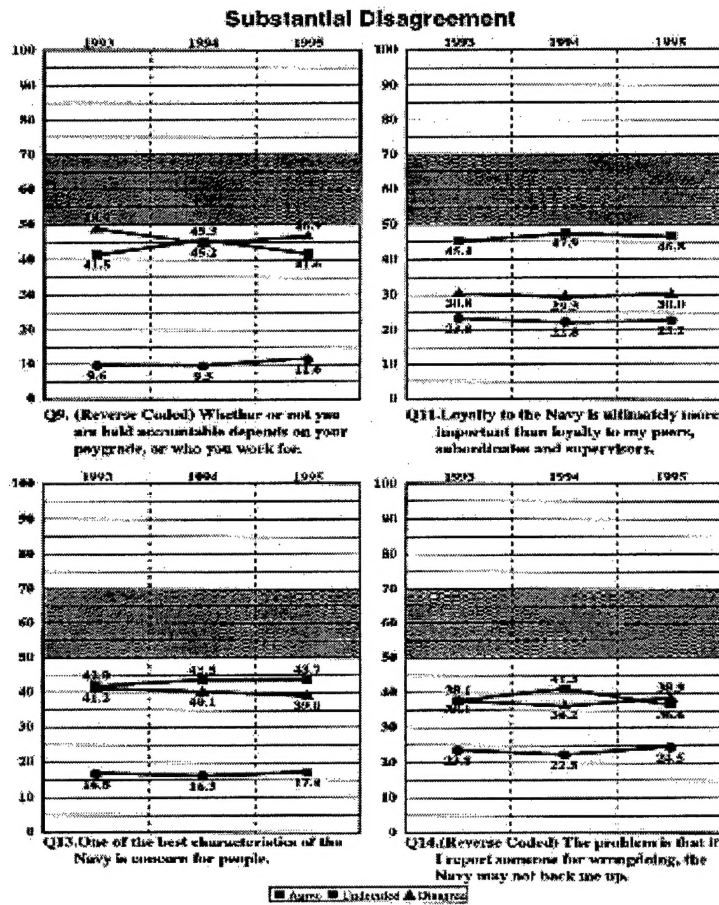Legend: ■ Agree ● Undecided ▲ Disagree

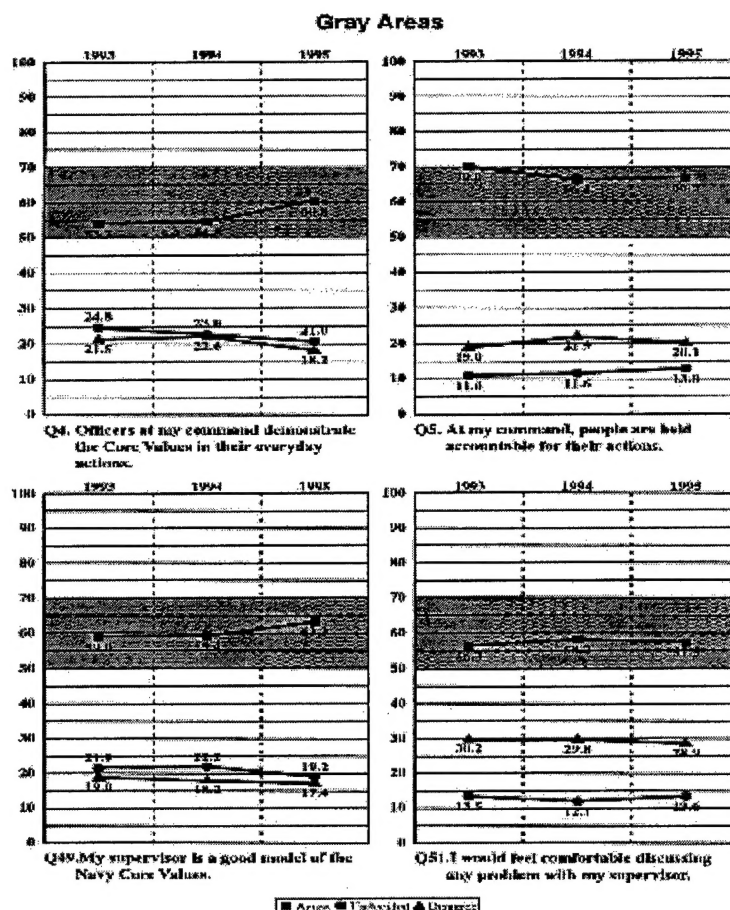Figure 3. Three-Year Response Patterns for Questions 9, 11, 13, and 14.

Gray Areas

Figure 4. Three-Year Response Patterns for Questions 4, 5, 49, and 51.

Gray Areas. In this category have been placed those survey questions which have agreement responses ranging from 50-90 percent. These are mid-range response patterns. They do not indicate extreme polarization or attitudes and opinions at variance with the NCV. Neither do they show strong commitment to the NCV or a very positive outlook on elements of the command climate and leadership addressed by the survey questions. Uncertainty is quite high for many questions. Figure 4 shows responses to Questions 4, 5, 49, and 51. In the 1995 survey, 60.8 percent agreed that officers at their command demonstrate the Core Values in their everyday actions (Question 4); 18.2 percent disagreed, and an even higher percentage (21.0%) were undecided. In the case of Question 5, which dropped into the Gray Areas in year two, 66.9 percent agreed that, at their commands, people are held accountable for their actions; 20.1 percent disagreed, 13.0 percent were undecided. In response to Question 49, 63.6 percent of those sampled agreed that their supervisor was a good model of the NCV, whereas 17.4 percent disagreed, and 19.2 percent were undecided. Response patterns on Question 51 ("I would feel comfortable discussing any problem with my supervisor") show 57.5 percent agreeing, 28.9 percent disagreeing, and 13.6 undecided.

Discussion

The Navy's success in building its desired values community is indicated by the levels of consensus on the Navy Core Values, and, of course, on behaviors which are congruent with those values. Behavioral changes, much more difficult to measure, are not addressable through surveys of this type. However, it can be safely concluded that there is some progress being made. More Navy men and women can identify the three Navy Core Values, and more express, by means of the survey, attitudes and opinions which are in accordance with the NCV. By far, the majority of trends in survey results between 1993 and 1995 are in a positive direction. This is true on both the item level, and in item inter-category movement.

Results are very clear: Navy men and women believe the Core Values are applicable to their daily lives, and that adherence to those values will make the Navy a better place to work. There is, in general, strong value consensus

for high levels of responsibility and accountability in Navy people, and there is evidence that certain dishonest or unethical actions are recognized and not viewed favorably. What these Navy men and women are less sure of is the commitment to these values by the Navy and their leaders, and they sometimes fail to see sufficient evidence that Navy leaders "walk the talk" when it comes to the Navy Core Values.

Items in the Substantial Disagreement category represent areas where there remains polarization with respect to certain issues and concerns. Whether or not the Navy really cares for its people, really rewards loyalty, and will really back up its people who report inappropriate behavior, are all areas of substantial disagreement. Opinions in these areas need to be changed. However, it is in the Gray Areas that the Navy should perhaps focus its efforts at inculcation and reinforcement, where responses indicate targets of opportunity for clarification and trust building.

High levels of undecided, which are evidenced in some response patterns, represent an uncertainty that is disturbing. Too many of the Navy's men and women remain to be convinced of the Navy's full commitment to its Core Values and to those actions which must be taken to reinforce them. These areas of uncertainty, where large numbers of Navy members show confusion and skepticism, provide additional targets for probing, indoctrination, training and organizational development efforts. Focus groups and other data collection procedures should be conducted to identify impediments to values consensus, particularly with young and lower-ranking personnel. Ultimately, there will have to be additional research to determine the behavioral dimensions of changes in values, as well as the fiscal impacts of the Navy Core Values.

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